

ms Henry David Thoreau.
350 1817 - 1862.

My acquaintance with Thoreau
commenced in the year 1854.
During the summer of that year
I purchased at one of our book-
sellers in New Bedford, a copy
of "Walden, or Life in the Woods".
Previously I had never heard of
its author, but on looking over
the pages of this admirable
and most original book, I
found so many observations
relative to plants, birds
and ~~objects~~ of natural
objects generally in which
I was also interested, I at
once felt that I had found a
congenial spirit. I may add
by way of explanation, and also

at the risk ² of egotism, that
during this season, while
engaged in re-building a
house in the country a few
miles from New Bedford,
I had erected a small
building, similar to one I
had ~~previously~~ built at
a previous home, and to which
I had given the same name,
that of my "Shanty." As I
was ^{daily} "superintending" my building
and agricultural operations,
my family being then in our
city home, I found it more
convenient, as well as, well-
adapted to my habits, to
make this little building
my temporary home.
From this humble edifice

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I addressed my first letter to
the author of *Walden*. The fol-
lowing is an extract from his
reply. "I had duly received
your very kind and frank
letter, but delayed to answer
it thus long, because I have
little skill as a correspondent,
and wished to send you some-
thing more than any thanks.
I was gratified by your prompt
and hearty acceptance of
my book. Yours is the only
word of greeting I am likely
to receive from a dweller in
the woods like myself,
from where the whiffpo-wits
and cuckoos are heard,
and there are better than
moral clouds drifting

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and real breezes blowing".
My first personal interview
with him was in December
of this year (1854.) He was
bound to Stamford to
deliver a lecture, and I
had invited him to be my
guest on his way thither.

I had expected ^{him} at noon,
but as he did not arrive,
I had given him up for the
day. In the latter part of the
afternoon, I was engaged in
clearing off the snow which
had fallen during the day,
from my front steps, when
upon looking up, I saw
^{a man} walking up the carriage

road carrying a portmanteau
in one hand and an um-
brella in the other. He
was dressed in a long
overcoat of dark color,
and wore a dark soft
hat. I had no suspicion
it was Thoreau, and rather
supposed it was a pedlar
of small wares. As he came
near me he stopped and
as I did not speak, he
said, "you do not know
me". It at once flashed
on my mind that the
person before me was
my correspondent whom
I had expected in the
morning, and who in

in my imagination I had
figured as a stout and robust
person, instead of the small
and rather inferior looking
man before me. Howard
concealed my disappointment
and at once replied, "I presume
this is Mr Thoreau," and taking
his portmanteau conducted
me to the house & to his room
already awaiting him.

My acquaintance with T. was from 1854 to the
time of his death 1862. During these years
we exchanged visits annually. He was
much interested in the botany of our
region finding many marine plants
he had not before seen.

My disappointment at his personal
~~superior presence~~. ~~his~~
~~appearance~~
however passed off on hearing
his conversation at the table,
& during the evening, and
rarely through the glass
of my subsequent acquaint-
ance with him did his
personal appearance
conflict with his noble
powers of mind, his rich
philosophical conversation
and broad erudition.
He was a strong man, both
in mind & body, if we
estimate him by the
results of his labors. His
face was greatly improved
in manly expression by
the growth of his beard

which he wore in full during the latter years of his life.

The most expressive feature of his face was his eye, blue in color, and full of the gentlest humanity and intelligence. His head was of medium size, the same as that of Emerson wearing a number seven hat — his arms were rather long, and his legs short, and hands and feet ^{rather} large.

His sloping shoulders were a mark of observation.

But when in usual health he was strong & vigorous — a remarkable pedestrian, trying out nearly all his

companions in his prolonged
 tramps through woods and
 marshes when in pursuit
 of some rare plant or the
 object of interest. In Thoreau,
 as in Dr Kane, Lord Nelson
 and other brave and heroic
 men, it was the spirit
 more than the temple in
 which it dwelt that made
 the man.

At the time of my first ac-
 quaintance with Thoreau
 the admirers of his works,
 "A Week on the Concord and
 Merrimack Rivers," and "Walden
 or Life in the Woods," these being
 his only published works, ~~at~~
 were limited to a few

among whom the most prom-
 inent were, Emerson, ^{Channing} and
 Hoar of Concord, Messrs
 Blake and Brown of Worcester,
 Mr Marston Watson of Plymouth,
 and the writer. Some
 accused him of being
 an imitator of Emerson,
 others as being unsocial,
 and generally as being
 impracticable, and ascetic.
 Now he was none of these -
 a more original man - never
 lived ^{nor} one more thoroughly
 a personification of himself.
 Having been an occasional
 guest at his home, I can
 assert that no man could

hold a finer relationship
 with his family than he.
 The family during most
 of my acquaintance
 with it, consisted of his
 father, mother and sister
 Sophia. An older brother,
^{John} and younger sister, ^{Helga}, had
 been deceased several
 years. John Thoreau the
 father was a quiet, gen-
 tlemanly man, short
 of stature, and as his
 name indicated of
 French origin, his father
 having been a native

the island of Jersey.

Mrs Thoreau, the mother was a tall woman, and in her youth ^{was} said to have been handsome, a great talker and quite dramatic in action - pleasant and hospitable, a good mother and wife.

Before her marriage she received the admiration, if not the offer of matrimony from Daniel Webster, but found doubtless a much happier life,

if a more humble one in
her choice of Mr Thoreau.

Miss Thoreau was a lady
of too marked a character
not to have a particular
notice. Of a fine dignified
person, great serenity of
character, with excellent
powers of conversation and
in conversation, ^{intellectually} she was
the feminine representation
of her brother, whom she
survived some fifteen
years. An elder brother
John, and a younger
sister Ellen died early.
John died of lock-jaw
caused by a slight wound
on his thumb while strapping
his razor. His brother Henry
so deeply sympathized

worth him as to have most
 of the symptoms of this dreadful
 disease as he informed me
 on one of his visits to me -
 the narration of which
 overcame ^{him} so much that
 he went to the door for air,
 and I quickly turned the
 conversation to some other
 subject. It was the only time
 I ever saw ^{him} show any deep
 emotion.

There was one element in Thomson
 not generally known even to
 his friends, that of humour, to
 which he added a love for music.
 He was fond of sailor songs, par-
 ticularly those of Dibdin, and
 I have heard him sing "Tom
 Bowling" in good nautical
 style to a few friends. He also
 played upon the German flute,

~~And~~ with which he ¹⁴ often whittled away an hour
while living in his shanty at Walden-pond.
After his death his surviving sister Miss Sophia
& Therman presented the flute my son Walter

(Daniel Ricketson)